ART BY ICHIHA AKIZUKI
WRITTEN BY MAI MOCHIZUKI
CHARACTER DESIGNS BY
SHIZU YAMAUCHI

CHAPTER 16
THE LOST DRAGON —KAJIWARA AKIHITO'S REPORT— (PART 2)

THANK YOU FOR COMING!

OH, YEAH. YOUR APPOINTMENT... IS IT APPRAISAL?

AH, THAT WAS DELICIOUS!

NO.

THEY JUST SAID THEY WANTED MY ADVICE.

NOW THAT WE'VE GOTTEN OUR FILL OF THE FAMOUS LOCAL YUDOFU,

IT'S TIME TO HEAD BACK TO NANZENJI.

I FOUND OUT ABOUT THIS THROUGH MY GRANDFATHER. I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS YET.

MOST PEOPLE GO TO TEMPLES...

...TO GET ADVICE, YOU KNOW?

I DO HOPE IT'S NOTHING TOO TROUBLE-SOME...

MIGHT YOU BE YAGASHI-RA-SAN?

お抹茶券

THE PLACE IS FILLED WITH MANY A PRECIOUS OBJECT.

SOME ARE ON DISPLAY FOR THE PUBLIC.

THIS IS WHERE THE HEAD ABBOT LIVES, RIGHT?

ARE TOURISTS ALLOWED IN?

I AM.

A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU. MY NAME IS ENSHO.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR COMING TO SEE US.

I SHALL BE YOUR GUIDE.

PLEASE, COME THIS WAY.

WOW, THIS SCROLL IS REALLY SOMETHING.

BUT WHAT DOES IT SAY?

IT'S TOO STYLIZED FOR ME TO READ.

YES...

IT'S QUITE IMPRES-SIVE.

ZUIRYU?

IT SAYS "ZUIRYU" OR "AUSPICIOUS DRAGON."

ZUIRYU IS THE FIRST TITLE OF NANZENJI'S FULL NAME.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT?

I CAN SEE WHY THEY CALL YOU THE HOLMES OF TERAMACHI SANJO.

INDEED.

THE SCROLL WAS DONE BY NANZENJI'S EIGHTH SUPER-INTENDENT PRIEST, SHIMADA KIKUZEN,

AND IS THE WRITTEN FORM OF NANZENJI'S FIRST TITLE.

COME NOW.

PEOPLE ONLY CALL ME HOLMES BECAUSE MY SURNAME IS YAGASHIRA.

THAT'S WHAT HE ALWAYS SAYS.

NO NEED TO BE HUMBLE.

I'VE HEARD YOU'VE DONE AMAZING THINGS, AT NINNAJI AND ELSE-WHERE.

NINNAJI?

AH... I DID AN APPRAISAL THERE. THAT'S ALL.

WHAT? DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT?

HALT

WHILE WE'RE HERE,

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE SOME OF OUR FINEST PIECES BEFORE WE GET TO BUSINESS?

I CERTAINLY WOULD.

Figures.

*Hojo: The head abbot's quarters

THIS... IT'S MAGNIFI-CENT.

LET US BEGIN WITH THE HOJO*.

IT'S SAID TO BE A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SEIRYODEN FROM THE IMPERIAL PALACE.

THIS IS MY FIRST TIME SEEING THESE SCREEN PAINTINGS. THEY'RE TRULY MAGNIFICENT.

YEAH, THEY'RE TOTALLY DOPE!

THESE SLIDING SCREEN PAINTINGS WERE DONE BY THE KANO SCHOOL:

"BIRDS AND FLOWERS OF THE FOUR SEASONS," "THE TWENTY-FOUR PARAGONS OF FILIAL PIETY"...

AND "TIGERS IN THE BAMBOO GROVE" BY KANO TAN'YU.

THEY'RE ALL PRIZED TREASURES OF THE TEMPLE.

IT'S TWO OLD GUYS...

NEXT IS THE STATUE OF KANZAN AND JITTOKU.

ON THE LEFT IS KANZAN, THE RIGHT JITTOKU.

THEY WERE PRIESTS DURING THE TANG DYNASTY ...

...KNOWN FOR THEIR ECCEN-TRICITY.

CREATORS OFTEN PORTRAY THEM LIKE THIS IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE.

MMM

MAGNIFI-CENT...

IT'S CUTE AND ALL, BUT IT'S STILL JUST A STATUE OF TWO OLD MEN CUDDLING...

I CAN SEE YOU HAVE A PASSION FOR ART.

THIS ONE ISN'T OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC...

BUT I INVITE YOU TO COME VIEW "UNRYUZU" IN THE MAIN HALL AS WELL.

THE MAIN HALL?

WE'RE GOING BACK THERE AGAIN?

MAY I?

Yeah, figures.

OF COURSE.

...

AKIHITO-SAN,

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

LIKE... THE WAY YOU WALK AND CARRY YOUR-SELVES.

YOU'RE LIKE ELEGANT KYOTO MEN.

NO.

I WAS JUST THINKING... YOU AND THAT PRIEST KINDA HAVE A SIMILAR VIBE.

DO WE?

I SEE...

I'M AFRAID I'M IN NO POSITION TO JUDGE.

I COULD LEARN A THING FROM YOU.

SINCE I GOTTA BE A KYOTO MAN FOR MY SHOW AND ALL.

THIS IS THE WORK OF IMAO KEINEN.

"UNRYUZU."

HOW MAG-NIFICENT...

YOU HAVE MY THANKS.

I'M SO GRATEFUL TO HAVE SEEN THESE PIECES.

IT'S AS THOUGH THOSE PIERCING EYES SEE RIGHT THROUGH YOU.

THE SHEER POWER OF IT...

IN TRUTH... "UNRYUZU" IS WHAT WE WANTED YOU TO LOOK AT.

IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH IT?

YOU SHOULD HEAR THE REST FROM THE VICE ABBOT.

SHOAN

NANZENJI VICE ABBOT: UNSHO

GARDENER: KIKUCHI

ENSHO

I DO HOPE YOU'LL FORGIVE US FOR CALLING YOU HERE ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE.

WE OWE NANZENJI A GREAT DEAL.

OH, PLEASE.

KIKUCHI THE GARDENER FOUND IT ON THE GROUNDS.

AND WE RECEIVED THIS IN HIS ABSENCE.

THE TRUTH IS, THE HEAD ABBOT IS AWAY ON A TWO-WEEK STUDY MEETING...

NOW... WHAT DID YOU NEED MY ADVICE ABOUT?

A LETTER?

LET ME SEE.

Residents of Nanzenji Temple:
I have taken the dragon.

南禅寺様

龍を頂戴いたしました

"I HAVE TAKEN THE DRAGON"?

BUT NOTHING WAS STOLEN.

WE CONCLUDED IT WAS MERELY AN ILL-CONCEIVED PRANK, BUT...

WE ASSUMED IT WAS SOME KIND OF JOKE.

STILL, FOR CALITION'S SAKE, WE LOOKED AT EVERYTHING RELATED TO DRAGONS IN THE TEMPLE.

A SECOND, IDENTICAL LETTER WAS FOUND AT THE FEET OF THE KANZAN AND JITTOKU STATUE.

THREE DAYS LATER, EARLY IN THE MORNING...

YES.

IT'S UNSETTLING IN A NUMBER OF WAYS.

THAT'S THE STATUE OF THE OLD DUDES...

YOU FOUND A LETTER AT THE FEET OF THE STATUE?

I'M THE ONE WHO FOUND IT.

AND I'M CERTAIN IT WASN'T THERE THE NIGHT BEFORE.

IF IT'S THE WORK OF AN OUTSIDER, THAT MEANS THEY BROKE IN OVERNIGHT.

SOMEONE IS PLAYING A NASTY PRANK KNOWING THE VALUE OF THE ITEMS.

IF THIS IS AN INSIDE JOB,

WE THEN HEARD THE RUMORS ABOUT HOW SHARP YOU ARE,

WHICH IS WHY WE CALLED YOU FOR ADVICE.

YES... BUT AS BEFORE, NOTHING WAS ACTUALLY STOLEN.

THAT'S THE STRANGEST PART.

I UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY.

THINGS THEY'VE WRITTEN IN THE PAST, PREFERABLY.

THEN, IF I MAY,

COULD I SEE HANDWRITING SAMPLES FROM EVERYONE IN THE TEMPLE?

HAND-WRITING?

THE LETTER IS HANDWRITTEN.

AH, I SEE.

WHUNK

LET ME SEE...

120 FLAP

WHOOSH

WHOOSH

SO FAST...

CAN YOU REALLY TELL LIKE THAT?

PAUSE

WHAT? YOU FIND SOME-THING?

IS THAT...

IT'S THE SAME HAND-WRITING!

南禅

龍を頂戴いたしました

是無等等呪
故説般若波羅蜜多
即説呪曰
羯諦羯諦波羅羯諦
般若心経

!

THIS HANDWRITING... BELONGS TO THE HEAD ABBOT.

南禅寺様

龍を頂戴いた

THEN THE ONE WHO SENT THE LETTER WAS...

I SEE NOW.

THANK YOU FOR THIS.

UNSHO-SAMA,

AS THE LETTER STATES...

NANZENJI'S PRECIOUS "DRAGON" HAS ALREADY BEEN TAKEN.

SWAPPED ?!

RATHER THAN STOLEN, IT MIGHT BE MORE ACCURATE TO SAY THAT IT WAS SWAPPED.

B-BUT NOTHING WAS STOLEN!

What else did we see? The statue of the old dudes and the screens?

Was there a dragon painted on one of the screens?

Just what is Nanzenji's dragon? You'd think it was unique.

But it's not exactly like you could swap that out.

Holmes praised all of those.

Wait, no...

"IT'S QUITE IMPRESSIVE."

There was only one thing today he didn't call "magnificent."

YOUR ZUIRYU SCROLL.

IT'S A FAKE.

Y-YAGA-SHIRA-SAN...

I SEE THAT SCROLL EVERY DAY.

I'M CERTAIN I'D BE ABLE TO TELL IF IT HAD BEEN REP-LACED.

IT WAS BRILLIANTLY DONE, I MUST SAY.

IT'S ALMOST A CARBON COPY OF THE REAL THING.

IT'S AS IF THE MAKER...

...SUPPRESSED HIS OWN EGO AND PUT HIMSELF IN THE MINDSET OF THE ORIGINAL CREATOR.

YOU COULD SAY IT'S A PERFECT FORGERY.

BUT THERE'S NO SUCH AVARICE OR SELF-ASSERTION IN THE ZUIRYU SCROLL.

THERE ARE SIGNS OF CALCULATION AND DECEPTION IN YOUR AVERAGE FORGERY...

...IS A COUNTERFEITER OF NEAR PEERLESS COPYING SKILL.

WHOEVER MADE IT...

YOU SEE...

HOW COULD YOU EVEN TELL IT WAS A FAKE?

B-BUT THEN...

IT'S A FREQUENT ADAGE OF MY GRAND-FATHER'S.

NO MATTER HOW WELL MADE A FAKE MAY BE...

IT LACKS THE AURA OF THE REAL WORK.

THE JOB OF AN APPRAISER IS TO PERCEIVE THAT AURA OR LACK THEREOF.

"A FAKE IS A FAKE; IT IS NOT REAL."

AND THE ZUIRYU SCROLL YOU HAVE ON DISPLAY HAS NO AURA TO SPEAK OF.

VICE ABBOT.

YOUR TEMPLE IS KNOWN FOR THE FACT THAT IT ONCE DEALT WITH DECEPTIVE YOKAI.

IT'S SAID THEY WERE VANQUISHED BY THE PRIEST MUKAN FUMON VISITING FROM TOFUKUJI TEMPLE.

BUT I'M SORRY TO SAY THAT NOW...

SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS LATER...

AN IMPOSTOR HAS COME TO DWELL IN NANZENJI ONCE MORE.

RIGHT HERE!
SLAM

WHAT VIOLENCE BEHIND THAT CHARMIN' COUNTEN-ANCE.

WERE YOU TRYIN' TO SPLIT MY HEAD OPEN?

I WAS MADE TO LEARN AIKIDO FROM A YOUNG AGE AT MY GRANDFATHER'S INSISTENCE.

I ONLY MEANT TO FRIGHTEN YOU A BIT, BUT...

BLOCKING MY STRIKE WAS QUITE IMPRES-SIVE.

HOW'D YOU FIGURE IT OUT?

ENSHO ?!

THE MOMENT WE FIRST MET, SOMETHING SEEMED OFF.

WE WERE SURROUNDED BY OTHER VISITORS,

AND I EVEN BROUGHT A GUEST WITH ME UNAN-NOUNCED.

YET YOU PICKED ME OUT OF THE CROWD RIGHT AWAY.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU MUST HAVE ALREADY KNOWN WHO I WAS.

THEN WHEN YOU WERE SHOWING US AROUND, YOU SEEMED A BIT NERVOUS IN FRONT OF THE ZUIRYU SCROLL.

IN THE MOMENT, I ASSUMED THAT THE TEMPLE HAS A REASON FOR HAVING A FAKE ON DISPLAY...

...AND THAT THE REAL ONE WAS HIDDEN ELSEWHERE INSIDE.

BUT IN HINDSIGHT, YOU SIMPLY COULDN'T CONTAIN YOURSELF IN FRONT OF YOUR HANDIWORK.

"I WAS JUST THINKING... YOU AND THAT PRIEST KINDA HAVE A SIMILAR VIBE."

"LIKE... THE WAY YOU WALK AND CARRY YOUR-SELVES."

BUT THE REAL CLINCHER IS YOUR INCLINATION FOR IMITATION.

YOU ARE A COPYIST THROUGH AND THROUGH.

YOU NATURALLY TEND TO ADOPT THE MANNERISMS OF THOSE AROUND YOU.

THAT, OF COURSE, WAS A COPY TOO.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE HAND-WRITING?

THAT'S NOT WHAT I REALLY HAD MY EYE ON EARLIER.

THE ONLY THING I DON'T UNDERSTAND IS THE REASON WHY.

WHY WOULD YOU DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

WHY, YOU ASK?

是無等等

THE SAMPLES OF ENSHO'S HANDWRITING WERE INCONSISTENT OVER TIME.

PERHAPS HE WAS UN-CONSCIOUSLY COPYING WHOEVER WAS NEARBY AS HE WROTE.

能除一切苦

HOLMES!

WELL, HOLMES OF TERAMACHI SANJO...

WHAM

IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU!

AT FIRST, IT WAS EXCITIN'...

BUT I GOT SICK OF IT ALL PRETTY QUICK.

I'D MASTERED THE ART OF COUNTER-FEITING.

I GOT SO GOOD THAT NOBODY COULD TELL MY WORKS WERE FAKES.

I EVEN DECIDED TO TAKE THE TONSURE.

TO ATONE FOR MY CRIMES...

SO I WASHED MY HANDS OF THE BUSINESS.

I HEARD SOMEONE EXPOSED ONE OF MY COUNTERFEITS THAT'D GONE UNNOTICED FOR YEARS.

BUT THEN ONE DAY,

I THREW MYSELF INTO TRAINING, SAYIN' THE NENBUTSU DAY IN AND DAY OUT...

AND ONCE I HEARD THAT...

SOME KEEN-EYED BOY WHO CALLS HIMSELF "HOLMES."

BETTER YET, I HEARD IT WAS SOME KID THAT DID IT.

I FOUND MYSELF WANTIN' TO CHALLENGE YOU WITH MY ART.

YOUR ART?

DON'T YOU DARE GO CALLIN' THAT "ART."

A FAKE'S A FAKE, NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO...

FWAP

I LIKE IT BETTER THAN YOUR PRIM-AND-PROPER ACT.

SO THIS IS THE REAL YOU, EH?

!

OH, AND THE REAL ZUIRYU'S IN THE STORE-HOUSE.

BE SEEIN' YA!

GUESS YOU BEAT ME THIS ROUND...

SO I'LL TAKE MY LEAVE NOW.

WAIT!

DON'T, KIYOTA-KA-SAN!

FTCH

A PAMPERED CHILD LIKE YOU COULDN'T HOPE TO CATCH HIM.

ENSHO HAS LIVED HIS WHOLE LIFE IN THE SHA-DOWS...

HE HAS THE SKILLS OF A SHINOBI, IN A WAY.

I SUPPOSE IT DOES...

I HAVE TO SAY, IT STINGS A BIT TO BE CALLED A PAMPERED CHILD.

BUT ENSHO DIDN'T TRAIN HIS SKILLS TO PROTECT HIMSELF.

THEY'RE PURE SURVIVAL INSTINCTS.

TO FIGHT HIM HEAD-ON WOULD BE A FOOL'S ERRAND.

YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO THE HEAD ABBOT, HOLMES.

THAT GUY'S SCARY DAN-GEROUS!

UNSHO-SAMA, DID YOU KNOW HE WAS A COUNTER-FEITER?

AND IT WAS OUR DUTY TO ACCEPT HIM IN GOOD FAITH.

BUT HE'D MADE UP HIS MIND TO TAKE THE TONSURE,

I HAD REALIZED THAT ENSHO WAS NO ORDINARY MAN.

MOREOVER, HE APPROACHED HIS DAILY TRAINING WITH SINCERITY.

THAT HE HAD SOME KIND OF DARK PAST.

THAT HE WAS LYING ABOUT HIS IDENTITY.

BUT IN THE END, WE COULDN'T FILL THE VOID IN ENSHO'S SPIRIT...

I BELIEVE HE WAS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING A GENUINE PRIEST.

THAT'S WHERE YOU COME IN, NO?

WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO? SIMPLY LET HIM GO?

AS ENSHO SAID,

YOU WERE THE CATALYST FOR ALL THIS.

AND YOU WILL HAVE TO BE THE ONE TO STOP HIM.

WHAT...

BUT IT ALSO MADE HIM HAPPY.

HERE'S WHAT I THINK...

YOUR EXPOSURE OF HIS COUNTERFEITS HURT ENSHO'S PRIDE.

PERHAPS HE FELT...

...HE'D FOUND HIS FATED RIVAL.

AFTER LIVING IN THE SHADOWS FOR SO LONG, HE FELT AS THOUGH SOMEONE HAD FINALLY SEEN HIM.

SO WE'LL LEAVE ENSHO IN YOUR HANDS...

THAT'S WHY YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STOP HIM.

THOUGH I HAVE NO DOUBT THE TASK WILL ENRICH YOU AS WELL.

HOLMES OF TERAMACHI SANJO.

I SEE WHY YOU'RE THE VICE ABBOT OF NANZENJI.

VERY WELL.

I WILL EXPOSE EVERY LAST COUNTERFEIT HE MAKES.

AND I WILL MAKE HIM REALIZE THAT THEIR VERY CREATION IS POINTLESS.

HEY, IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT.

I'M SORRY FOR GETTING YOU WRAPPED UP IN ALL OF THIS, AKIHITO-SAN.

HE'S DESPICA-BLE.

BUT THAT ENSHO GUY REALLY IS SOMETHING, HUH?

HIS FORGERIES MAY TRULY BE PEERLESS...

THAT MAN IS NO TWO-BIT COUNTER-FEITER.

COPYING COMES AS EASILY TO HIM AS BREATH-ING.

THAT PROWESS REQUIRES SKILL IN A MYRIAD OF DISCIP-LINES.

BUT MY PERSONAL FEELINGS ON THE MATTER ARE COMPLI-CATED.

TO THINK THAT I WAS THE ONE WHO INTERRUPTED THAT...

SUCH A DESPICABLE CON ARTIST WAS REFORMING HIMSELF AS A PRIEST.

I SEE...

INSTEAD OF GOING BACK TO COUNTER-FEITING,

ENSHO MIGHT HAVE CONTINUED HIS TRAINING AND BECOME A REAL PRIEST.

Or perhaps if they had by a veteran appraiser and not Holmes...

If Ensho's forgeries had never been exposed...

BUT OH WELL...

NO MATTER WHAT FORGERIES HE PRESENTS...

I'LL CRUSH THEM ALL.

I WAS SIMPLY DOING MY JOB.

THAT'S THE HOLMES I KNOW!

...WHAT?

*TCH

SLAM

YOU EXAGGE-RATE, I'M SURE.

Even the way you clicked your tongue was scary!

WHEN YOU SWUNG THAT FAN, IT TOTALLY LOOKED LIKE A DAGGER!

YOU WERE SUPER SCARY WHEN YOU WERE FIGHTING WITH ENSHO, YOU KNOW!

I SHOULD HOPE YOU WOULDN'T ANYWAY.

YOU WOULD EARN YOURSELF A SMACK FROM MY FAN THAT WAY.

And would you kindly take your hand off me?

NO, I MEAN IT!

MADE ME REALIZE I SHOULD NEVER MAKE YOU ANGRY...

WHEN I TELL HIM THAT I LET A MASTER COUNTERFEITER WHO CHALLENGED ME GET AWAY...

HE'LL LIKELY UNLEASH HELLFIRE ON ME.

What were you thinking, you halfwit?!

AH... MY CONDOLENCES...

THAT REMINDS ME. THE VICE ABBOT SAID HE'D KEEP THIS QUIET...

ARE YOU GONNA TELL THE OWNER ABOUT IT?

OF COURSE.

THOUGH I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

SAY, AKIHITO-SAN,

IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER PLANS TODAY, WOULD YOU STOP BY KURA?

AOI-SAN IS WORKING THIS AFTERNOON.

I'LL PREPARE SOME DELICIOUS COFFEE FOR US.

YEAH, SOUNDS GREAT!

VERY WELL.

I'LL REGALE YOU WITH ALL KYOTO'S MYSTERIES.

PERHAPS IN ADDITION TO THE YOKAI STORY,

AND TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE YOKAI IN NANZENJI.

OH!

You got me curious.

JUST KEEP IT LIGHT. I DON'T LIKE STUFF THAT'S TOO SCARY...

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE STORY OF ICHIJO BRIDGE?

IT'S QUITE THE MYSTERIOUS TALE INDEED.

HEY, DON'T JUST LAUNCH INTO IT!

IT CONCERNS ABE NO SEIMEI...

CHAPTER 16

END